DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 903 CG 015 696

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TITLE Natural-Family Interactions and Their Relationship to Drug Use and Delinquency.
PUB DATE Aug 81
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (89th, Los Angeles, CA, August 24-26, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Antisocial Behavior; *Delinquency; *Drug Use; Family Relationship; Instruction; Males; Negative Reinforcement; Observation; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Influence; *Peer Influence

ABSTRACT

Studies in group homes have shown that behaviors suggestive of a reinforcing relationship with an adult and of adult teaching are inversely related to self-reported delinquency among group home adolescents. Adolescents (N=29) living in natural family settings completed several self-report measures of delinquency and drug use to determine whether their perception that parents or peers disapproved of their drug use and delinquency would make them less likely to engage in such behaviors. Interactions between the boys and their parents were directly observed and rated for talk, proximity, social teaching, and negative interaction behavior. Results showed consistent, significant inverse relationships between parental use of teaching and most of the questionnaire measures of drug use and delinquency, with the implication that teaching may be an important parenting behavior linked to youth avoidance of delinquency and drug use. A positive and significant relationship also occurred between parental negative behaviors and youth delinquency and drug use. The findings suggest that perceived approval or disapproval by parents and peers is related to delinquency and drug use among adolescents. (NRB)

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Natural-Family Interactions and Their Relationship to Drug Use and Delinquency

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CG 015696

Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, 1981.

Naturalistic observation procedures are widespread in behavioral research with families. These procedures are used frequently in the assessment of the effectiveness of various interventions with children and their parents (e.g., Patterson 1974; also see Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis). However, such naturalistic procedures have not been directed often to the identification of naturally occurring family variables that are related to adolescent conduct. This is not to say that there has been no research linking family variables and adolescent conduct. There are a number of interview and questionnaire studies that have suggested such links. For example, such research has suggested that a role is played in youth misconduct by poor parenting practices, including, overly punitive or lax discipline, absence of reasoning, and inadequate supervision (Conger, 1977; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Hirschi, 1969).

Recently, studies undertaken in group homes by my colleagues have attempted to identify social interaction variables in those settings that are related to delinquency. Their findings have shown that behaviors suggestive of a reinforcing relationship with an adult and of adult teaching are inversely related to self-reported delinquency among group-home adolescents (Bedlington, Solnick, Braukmann, Kirigin, & Wolf, 1979; Solnick, Braukmann, Bedlington, Kirigin, & Wolf, 1981). These group home studies were based on the conceptualization that persons in a youth's environment who have developed some reinforcing value for the youth can influence the youth's delinquent and drug-use behavior through their social teaching (Braukmann, Kirigin, & Wolf, 1980). The more the social teacher has reinforcing value, the more the youth risks reinforcement loss when he or she behaves in a manner that would be disapproved of by

the social teacher. The present study was carried out to determine whether the findings obtained in group homes based on naturalistic observation have generality to natural families of adolescents. This study also assessed the relationship between questionnaire measures of youth perceptions of social consequences and their self-reported delinquency and drug use. If they perceive that parents or peers disapprove of drug-use and delinquency, are they less likely to engage in drug use and delinquency? Such a finding would be congruent with our conceptualization and consistent with findings by some other investigators (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979).

Method

Subjects and Setting

The sample for this study included 29 adolescent boys, aged 11 to 18 and their families. The boys in the present study had been named as friends by boys who were living in group homes for delinquent youths. All 29 boys lived at home with one or two parents.

Measurement

Both behavioral and questionnaire measures were obtained. The behavioral measures involved the direct observation of interactions between the youths and their parents. Each family was observed three times for about an hour and a half each time. The observation sessions took place after dinner with all family members present. Families were asked to ignore the observers and go about their usual activities. The only restriction imposed was that no guests were allowed. An observer, or sometimes two independent observers, used a 10-second interval procedure to sample the behavior of the target youth and each parent. At the end of each 10-second interval

the observers recorded the occurrence of the following interaction components: talk, proximity, social teaching, and negative interaction behaviors.

Talk was defined as any verbalization the youth directed to a parent. We were interested in the measure of youth talk to the parents as a measure of the parents' reinforcing value for the youth. Point-by-point comparison of the scores of two independent observers over one-fourth of the observation sessions showed that the "talk" measure was reliable at the level of 88 percent.

Proximity was defined as physical proximity of less than three feet between a youth and a parent. This measure was regarded as another index of the parent's reinforcing value for the youth. Reliability on proximity was 94 percent.

The Parent Social Teaching Measure was described by Martha Bedlington in her paper. It involved the components of rationale-giving, praise or approval of a youth's behavior, modeling and explaining how to do tasks, teaching academic or other skills, and providing general-knowledge information. Reliability on teaching was 77 percent.

Parental Negative Interaction Behaviors were defined as statements of negative feedback (e.g., "Your room is a mess"), derogatory remarks (e.g., "You are so dumb"), disagreement statements (e.g., "You are wrong"), and threats of aversive consequences ("If you don't get off the phone, you won't be able to use it again"). We expected that greater parental use of negative behaviors would be related to increased delinquency since it would diminish the parent's reinforcing value for the youth. In addition, use of parental negative interaction behaviors might be indicative of a

parenting style that relies on such behaviors instead of the positive social teaching responses thought to be inversely related to delinquency. Reliability on parental negative interation behaviors was 87 percent.

Now, I would like to show you some results.

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Slide 1 about here
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This slide shows the Pearson correlation coefficients for each of two direct observation measures--parental teaching and parental negative interaction behaviors--and several self-report measures of delinquency and drug use. Let me first describe the self-report measures listed in the left-hand column. The first three self-report measures listed were derived from the Self-Reported Delinquency (SRD) Questionnaire (Ageton & Elliott, 1978). This questionnaire included 48 questions regarding the frequency with which a youth engaged in various delinquent and drug-use behaviors during the year before the interview. The questionnaire included criminal offense questions such as, "How many times in the last year have you stolen something worth more than $50?" or "How many times have you used marihuana?", and status offense questions such as, "How many times in the last three months have you run away from home?" Like all other questionnaires in this study, it was administered to the youths in a private interview over the phone.

The second set of self-report measures in this table were obtained from the Initial Drug Use Questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered at the time that the youths were first contacted. It consisted of questions regarding the frequency with which the youths used and abused drugs or alcohol for the period of one year before the interview. An

example of a question to determine substance use was "During the past 12 months, on about how many days did you use marihuana or hashish?" An example of a question to determine substance abuse was "Indicate any of the following things that have ever happened to you on more than one occasion while or soon after you used alcohol." The options included getting into a fight, being stopped by the police, having an accident, and not remembering doing what others said you did. The last set of self-report measures were obtained from a shortened version of the Initial Drug Questionnaire that was administered monthly. For the purpose of the correlations in this study, the only monthly questionnaires employed were the two given closest to the in-home observation dates.

In this and in all subsequent analyses, we controlled for the age of the youth by conducting partial correlations. We did this because we, and other investigators, have found that age is significantly and positively related to measures of drug use and delinquency.

In this slide, the data show consistent, significant inverse relationships between parental use of teaching and most of the questionnaire measures of drug use and abuse, and delinquency. The findings obtained with teaching are consistent with those obtained in group homes. They suggest that teaching may be an important parenting behavior that is linked to youth avoidance of delinquency and drug use.

Also shown here are the correlations between the observed negative interaction behaviors by parents and the self-reported drug and delinquency measures. Findings suggest a positive and by and large significant relationship between parental negative behavior and youth delinquency and drug use. This is consistent with previous work with delinquent families (e.g.,

Stuart, 1971) and it suggests that parents of delinquent children tend to engage in high rates of behaviors such as negative feedback and criticism.

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Slide 2 about here

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This slide shows the correlations between the observed measures of proximity to parents and talk to parents with self-reported drug use and delinquency. None of these correlations are significant. However, in the case of proximity to parents, the correlations are consistently negative, as we would expect. Furthermore, they are of the same magnitude as those obtained over individual youths in the Solnick group home study. It is possible that as we add more youths to the sample these correlations may turn out to be significant, but they are not large. The correlations between talk to parents and the self-report measures shown in the right column simply do not replicate the relationship found in group homes.

In addition to the directly observed measures of social interaction behaviors that we have just talked about, we also collected self-report measures of social influences. These were collected in phone interviews. One of these social influence measures was perceived parental consequences for drug use. For each youth, an overall perceived parental consequence for drug use score was obtained, by averaging over perceived parental consequence scores obtained for each of several drug categories. The perceived parental consequence score obtained for each drug category was based on the youth's responses to three questions. The first question was, "Would your parents approve of your use of this drug?" If parents would disapprove, a minus score was given. If they would be neutral or would approve, a positive score was given. This score was then multiplied

by the scores obtained from the other two questions: "How important is your parents' approval or disapproval to you?" and "How likely are your parents to find out if you used this drug?" The resulting scores thus could range from a high negative score to a high positive score. A high negative score would mean that the youth saw his parents as strongly disapproving of drug use, their disapproval was very important to the youth, and their detection of his use would be very likely. On the other hand, a high positive score would mean that the youth saw his parents as strongly approving of drug use, their approval was very important to him, and they were very likely to know when he used it. A perceived peer consequence score for each youth was derived in the same manner as the parental score.

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Slide 3 about here

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This slide shows the correlations between the youths' perceived social consequences for drug use from parents or peers and the youths' self-reported drug use. As can be seen, there are significant and positive correlations with drug use for both perceived parental consequences and perceived peer consequences. This means that in both cases the further a youth's score was from the strongly disapproving end of the scale continuum, the more his drug use. In other words, the less the probability of significant disapproval for drug use, the more the drug use. Interestingly, the mean score of perceived parental consequences of drug use fell closer to the disapproval end of the scale than did the mean peer score. This means that parents were seen as being more disapproving of drug use than were peers.

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Slide 4 about here

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This slide shows the correlations between perceived peer and parent consequences for drug use and the youth's self-reported use of each of several substances during the past year. It can be seen that perceived peer consequences were significantly related to use of alcohol, marihuana and hard drugs such as psychedelics and narcotics. However, this was not the case for stimulants and depressants. Perceived parental consequences for use was significantly related to alcohol use and marihuana use but not to the use of stimulants and depressants or hard drugs.

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Slide 5 about here

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This slide shows the correlations between youth perceived consequences for non-drug criminal and status offenses and the frequency of self-reported non-drug offenses for the past three months. The perceived consequences for non-drug offenses were derived in the same manner previously described for drug use. Criminal offenses included such acts as theft and assault. Status offenses included such acts as truancy and running away from home. It appears that perceived peer consequences for delinquent activities is related to both criminal and status non-drug offenses. It also appears that parental consequences for delinquent behaviors is related to criminal non-drug activites.

DISCUSSION

A major goal of this study was to look at the relationship of certain parenting behaviors to drug use and delinquency in natural families.

Several of the parenting variables we examined had previously been found to be related to drug use and delinquent behavior in group homes. Thus, the present study represented a test of the generality of earlier group home findings. As in previous group home research, we found parental teaching to be negatively related to youth delinquency and drug use. Parents who actively use social teaching behaviors like reasoning and praise have youths who report less delinquency and drug use. This relationship is consistent with our view that significant adults can play a crucial role in adolescents' avoidance of drug use and delinquency. Unfortunately, due to the correlational nature of our analyses, we cannot state whether parental teaching is causally related to delinquent and drug use behaviors. Our present findings might be due, to some extent, to the fact that less delinquent children are easier to teach than their more delinquent counterparts. However, how easy youths are to teach and how delinquent they are may both be a function of previous effective teaching by reinforcing others.

The present data also indicated a positive relationship between parental negative interaction behaviors and drug use and delinquency. As I discussed earlier, this may be because negative parent behavior hinders the development of reinforcing value. Such behavior also may reflect the absence of a teaching approach to behavior influence. However, negative parent behavior may also be a reaction to the delinquency and drug use of the youth. Thus, parental negative behavior might be both a cause and an effect in a reciprocal relationship with youthful misbehavior.

Our correlations over youths on proximity, while not significant, were consistently negative and of the same order of magnitude as those

found in the Solnick group home study. However, unlike the findings obtained in group homes, this study did not find that a measure of youth talk to parents was significantly related to delinquency. We will be examining further this negative finding as we continue to collect data.

The present study also investigated the relationship between self-reported drug use and delinquency and youth perceptions of social consequences for such activity. Our findings suggested that perceived approval or disapproval by parents and peers are related to delinquency and drug use. These findings are consistent with those obtained by Stumphauzer (1976; 1980), who concluded that adolescents learn to drink, and take drugs partly through the social reinforcement of peers and parents. Such causal inferences concerning the influence of relevant friends on adolescent deviant behavior need to take into account what Kandel (1978) describes as "assortative pairing". This refers to the adolescents' natural selection of peers that share certain attributes such as level of substance use. That youths who use drugs have friends who approve of their drug use may be as much a function of the youth's choice of friends as it is of the influence of the friends on the youth. Probably both assortative pairing and social contingencies by peers are involved in the peer social consequences findings. Assortative pairing may explain why more of the correlations involving perceived peer consequences were significant than were those involving perceived parental consequences. An adolescent can not choose as his parents people who are more approving of his increased drug use and delinquency, but he can so choose his friends.

During the upcoming year we will continue to collect data on the variables presented here today, as well as collect additional self-report

and direct observational measures. Through this continuing effort, we hope to achieve a better understanding and more definitive statements regarding the correlation between natural family variables and adolescent drug use and delinquent behavior.

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Correlations Between Observed Parental Behaviors

and Youth Delinquency and Drug Use

($\underline{n}$ = 29)

Delinquency and Drug Use Measures	Parental Teaching Behaviors	Parental Negative Interaction Behaviors
Self-Reported Delinquency Questionnaire (Last Year):		
Drug Offenses	-.39*	.33*
Non-Drug Offenses	-.29	.45*
Total Offenses	-.36*	.40*
Initial Drug Use Questionnaire:		
Use During Last Year	-.37*	.23
Abuse Ever	-.45*	.12
Monthly Drug Use Questionnaire:		
Drug Use Per Month	-.36*	.36*
Drug Abuse Per Month	-.40*	.36*

*$p < .05$

Slide 1

Correlations Between Observed Youth Interaction Behaviors

with Parents and Youth Delinquency and Drug Use

(n = 29)

Delinquency and Drug Use Measures	Proximity to Parents	Talk to Parents
Self-Reported Delinquency Questionnaire (Last Year):		
Drug Offenses	-.17	.02
Non-Drug Offenses	-.31	.01
Total Offenses	-.24	.02
Initial Drug Use Questionnaire:		
Use During Last Year	-.17	.22
Abuse Ever	-.14	-.10
Monthly Drug Use Questionnaire:		
Drug Use Per Month	-.12	.21
Drug Abuse Per Month	-.11	-.05

Slide 2

Correlations Between Youth-Perceived Social Consequences

and Youth Self-Reported Drug Use

(n = 29)

Delinquency and Drug Use Measures	Consequences from Parents	Consequences from Peers
Self-Reported Delinquency Questionnaire (Last Year):		
Criminal Drug Offenses	.37*	.43*
Status Drug Offenses	.23	.23
Total Drug Offenses	.37*	.43*
Initial Drug Use Questionnaire:		
Use During Last Year	.52**	.47**
Abuse Ever	.34*	.52**

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Slide 3

Correlations Between Youth-Perceived Social Consequences

and Self-Reported Use of Various Substances

(n = 29)

Initial Drug Use Questionnaire (Last Year)	Consequences from Parents	Consequences from Peers
Alcohol Use	.45**	.32*
Stimulant/Depressant Use	-.07	.27
Marijuana Use	.64***	.50**
Hard Drug Use	.21	.42**

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001

Slide 4

Correlations Between Youth-Perceived Social Consequences

and Self-Reported Non-Drug Offenses

($\underline{n}$ = 29)

Self-Reported Delinquency Questionnaire (Last Year)	Consequences from Parents	Consequences from Peers
Criminal Offenses	.34*	.65***
Status Offenses	.13	.29*

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001

Slide 5